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SUBJECT: TURKEY'S NEW PARLIAMENT CONVENES TO ELECT SPEAKER
AND FORM NEW GOVERNMENT

¶1. (U) This cable is Sensitive But Unclassified. Please handle accordingly.

¶2. (SBU) Summary. Turkey's newly elected MPs took their oaths without incident on August 4 and will convene again on August 9 to begin electing a Speaker and forming a government. PM Erdogan is expected to announce his new cabinet soon after President Sezer re-appoints him prime minister, likely to occur August 6. A cabinet shake-up is rumoured, with new faces to reflect the ruling Justice and Development Party's (AKP) more centrist image. How the pieces fit may provide another clue regarding FM Gul's still fuzzy presidential plans; he reportedly may remain foreign minister or be elected Speaker. Turkey could have a new Speaker and government as early as August 9. MPs may then take a ten day break before launching the 30-day presidential election process. End Summary.

¶3. (SBU) Turkey's 549 MPs were sworn in at a decorous, ten-hour ceremony on August 4. All eyes were on 21 pro-Kurdish deputies, elected as independents but now officially recognized as Democratic Society Party (DTP) MPs; in 1994, their colleagues were ejected from parliament for reciting the oath in Kurdish and wearing terrorist PKK colors. This time, all used Turkish, taking their seats alongside MPs from the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), Republican People's Party (CHP), Democratic Left Party (DSP) (which separated from CHP before the ceremony) and AKP. DTP leader Ahmet Turk made a point of shaking MHP Chairman Devlet Bahceli's hand in a goodwill gesture that set a harmonious tone for the new parliament. Given contentious agenda items including constitutional reform and addressing Turkey's Kurdish question, commentators viewed the constructive start as promising.

AND THE NEW SPEAKER IS...

¶4. (U) Nominations for Speaker are underway, with a vote possible as early as August 9. The election must be completed by August 13. Former Speaker Bulent Arinc has said he will not run; he will likely be appointed a Deputy PM. AKP deputies reportedly will vote on the party's candidate, with former Justice Minister Cemil Cicek the front runner. Koksall Toptan, Vecdi Gonul, Ulku Gunay, Murat Basesgioglu and Mehmet Ali Sahin are also possible candidates. Even Abdullah Gul's name has been mentioned. Depending on AKP's candidate, MHP may also nominate an MP. AKP reportedly offered one of its four Vice Speaker positions to MHP and may also offer one

to CHP.

NEW FACES IN THE CABINET

¶5. (SBU) President Sezer is expected to re-appoint Erdogan prime minister on August 6. Erdogan reportedly has his cabinet nominations in hand, ready to present to Sezer for approval. Sezer's approval is expected, meaning Turkey could have a new government as early as August 7. If a cabinet cannot be formed within 45 days of electing a Speaker, new elections may be called, however, the process is expected to proceed smoothly. Within a week of the cabinet's appointment, the prime minister must read the government's program to parliament. MPs will take a vote of confidence after approximately five days to complete the procedure.

¶6. (U) Contacts predict a cabinet shake-up, with new faces designed in part to reassure the public and secular institutions of AKP's more centrist approach. Where Gul falls in the mix will be key; he may hold the foreign minister position to keep his presidential options open or stand as AKP's Speaker candidate. Ali Babacan could step in as foreign minister or remain in charge of Turkey's EU accession process. If the EU slot opens up, AKP insider Saban Disli, Suat Kiniklioglu, Cevdet Yilmaz or Zeynep Dagi are possible contenders. Mehmet Simsek, a former Merrill Lynch advisor and Embassy FSN, may be named Economic Minister, with Kemal Unakitan remaining Finance Minister. Mehmet Saglam is a possible candidate for Education Minister, and Idris Naim Sahin may replace Abdulkadir Aksu as Interior Minister. Three women MPs reportedly will take State Minister positions, with Edibe Sozen expected to be take the Media Affairs portfolio, and Selma Kavaf and Nimet Cubukcu possible contenders for Women's Affairs and Culture

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portfolios.

¶7. (U) Former ministers will likely move to head parliamentary committees or high-level positions at AKP headquarters. Arinc reportedly is unlikely to land the Justice or Interior Ministry due to Sezer's objection but may end up as Labor Minister and one of several Deputy PMs.

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